

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method of making cheese, comprising:

- (a) processing a previous lot of milk to produce cheese curds and whey;
- (b) removing the cheese curds from the whey, wherein the whey includes fine particles of cheese curd;
- 5 (c) collecting the fine particles of cheese curd from the whey; and
- (d) adding the fine particles of cheese curd from the previous lot of milk into a subsequent lot of milk;
- (e) mixing the fine particles of cheese curd from the previous lot of milk into the subsequent lot of milk to form the cheese; and
- 10 (f) pasteurizing the subsequent lot of milk.

2. A method of claim 1, wherein the mixing step comprises reducing the particle size of at least a plurality of the fine particles of cheese curd and increasing surface area of the fine particles of cheese curd.

3. A method of claim 2, wherein the reducing step comprises mechanically reducing the size of the fine particles.

4. A method of claim 1, wherein the mixing step comprises at least partially solubilizing the fine particles of cheese curd from the previous lot of milk into the subsequent lot of milk.

5. A method of claim 4, wherein the mixing step comprises inhibiting the fine particles of cheese curd from settling out of the subsequent lot of milk.

6. A method of claim 1, wherein the mixing step comprises inhibiting the fine particles of cheese curd from settling out of the subsequent lot of milk.

7. A method of claim 1, wherein the fine particles of cheese curd are mixed into the subsequent lot of milk using a colloid mill.

8. A method of claim 7, wherein the fine particles of cheese curd are mixed into the subsequent lot of milk with a colloid mill set at from 0.01 inches to 0.04 inches.

9. A method of claim 1, wherein the mixing step comprises mixing without demineralization of the fine particles.

10. A method of claim 1, wherein the fine particles of cheese curd are collected using a fine saver.

11. A method of claim 10, wherein the fine particles of cheese curd are collected with a revolving, static, or a vibrating sieve type of fine saver.
12. A method of claim 1, wherein the previous lot of milk is processed with an acid.
13. A method of claim 12, wherein the previous lot of milk is processed with a direct addition of an acid or with a bacterial culture that ferments lactose to lactic acid.
14. A method of claim 12, further comprising washing the curds with a wash water, wherein the wash water contains fine particles of cheese curd; and collecting the fine particles of cheese curd from the wash water.
15. A method of claim 1, wherein the fine particles of cheese curd are mixed into the subsequent lot of milk using a homogenizer.
16. A method of claim 15, wherein the fine particles of cheese curd are mixed into the subsequent lot of milk with the homogenizer being a two-stage homogenizer that is set at between about 500 and about 3500 psi.
17. A method of claim 16, wherein the fine particles of cheese curd are mixed into the subsequent lot of milk with the homogenizer being a two-stage homogenizer that is set at about 2000 psi.

18. A method of claim 1, wherein the previous lot of milk is processed using rennet.

19. A method of claim 1, further comprising separating the subsequent lot of milk, wherein the fine particles of cheese curd are added after the subsequent lot of milk has been separated.

20. A method of claim 1, wherein the fine particles of cheese curd from the previous lot of milk are added to the subsequent lot of milk after pasteurizing the subsequent lot of milk.

21. A method of claim 20, wherein the fine particles of cheese curd from the previous lot of milk are mixed into the subsequent lot of milk with a colloid mill.

22. A method of claim 1, wherein the fine particles of cheese curd from the previous lot of milk are added into the subsequent lot of milk prior to the step of pasteurizing the subsequent lot of milk.

23. A method of claim 22, further comprising, prior to the step of pasteurizing the subsequent lot of milk, diverting the subsequent lot of milk around a separator.

24. A method of claim 22, wherein the fine particles of cheese curd are mixed into the subsequent lot of milk with a homogenizer.

25. A method of claim 1, further comprising separating cream from the subsequent lot of milk, wherein the fine particles of cheese curd from the previous lot of milk are added after the separating of the subsequent lot of milk and prior to the pasteurizing of the subsequent lot of milk.

26. A method of claim 25, wherein the fine particles of cheese curd are mixed into the subsequent lot of milk with a homogenizer.

27. A method of claim 1, further comprising, after the mixing step, processing the subsequent lot of milk to form cheese curds and whey of the subsequent lot of milk, wherein the fine particles of cheese curd from the previous lot of milk are incorporated into the matrix of the cheese curd of the subsequent lot of milk.

28. A method of making cheese, comprising:

- (a) processing a previous lot of milk to produce cheese curds and whey;
- (b) removing the cheese curds from the whey, wherein the whey includes fine particles of cheese curd;
- 5 (c) collecting the fine particles of cheese curd from the whey; and

(d) adding the fine particles of cheese curd from the previous lot of milk into a subsequent lot of milk;

(e) mixing the fine particles of cheese curd from the previous lot of milk into the subsequent lot of milk to form the cheese; and

10 (f) washing the curds with a wash water, wherein the wash water contains fine particles of cheese curd; and collecting the fine particles of cheese curd from the wash water.

29. A cheese, comprising:

(a) fine particles of cheese curd from a previous lot of milk; and

(b) cheese curd that is processed from a subsequent lot of milk, wherein the fine particles of cheese curd from the previous lot of milk are incorporated into the matrix 5 of the cheese curd of the subsequent lot of milk.

30. A cheese of claim 29, wherein the fine particles of cheese curd are incorporated at a ratio of about 0.4 pounds of the fine particles per 100 pounds of milk.

31. A cheese of claim 29, wherein the cheese curd is processed from acidified milk.

32. A cheese of claim 31, wherein the cheese comprises cottage cheese.

33. A cheese of claim 29, wherein the cheese curd is processed from rennet-treated milk.

34. A cheese of claim 33, wherein the cheese is selected from the group consisting of Cheddar, mozzarella, Swiss, and colby cheeses.

35. A cheese of claim 34, wherein the fine particles of cheese curd that are incorporated into the matrix of the cheese curd of the subsequent lot of milk have a size that is reduced.

36. A method of making a dressing, comprising:

- (a) processing a lot of milk to produce cheese curds and whey;
- (b) removing the cheese curds from the whey, wherein the whey includes fine particles of cheese curd;
- 5 (c) washing the cheese curds with a wash water, wherein the wash water contains fine particles of cheese curd;
- (d) collecting the fine particles of cheese curd from the whey and wash water;
- (e) adding the fine particles of cheese curd from the previous lot of milk to a mixture including salt, cultured flavor, milk, cream, and a stabilizer; and
- 10 (f) mixing the fine particles of cheese curd with the mixture to form the dressing.

37. A dressing, comprising:

- (a) fine particles of cheese curd isolated from a lot of milk;
- (b) salt;
- (c) cultured flavor;
- 5 (d) cream;
- (e) milk; and
- (f) a stabilizer.